



A Fourth for Texas

By U.S. Sen. John Cornyn

Some 10,000 citizens, many of them Texans, were in Galveston earlier this month to witness commissioning of the USS Texas, the world's most advanced and powerful nuclear submarine.

I wish every Texan could have joined First Lady Laura Bush, Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison and me for this moving ceremony. The event was a potent reminder of our resolve as a nation in confronting those who wish us harm. It was an occasion to remember the major stakes involved in the war on terrorism.

I was honored to give the keynote remarks, and focused my comments on the need for continued strong American leadership in today's troubled world. Another speaker was Dionel M. Aviles, Undersecretary of the Navy, a native of Bryan. The launching underscored the vital, ongoing role our state plays in defending America. In fact, the event was punctuated with attention to Texas history and values, particularly our frontier toughness and independent spirit.

Three World War II fighter planes from the Lone Star flight museum in Galveston thrilled the crowd before the ceremony. But most attention went to the USS Texas itself, including an artfully designed crest on its forward hull.

The crest includes an outline of our state's familiar borders. Behind the outline is the Texas Ranger badge, representing the unity of purpose between those who enforce Texas law and those sailors who will defend freedom. There are also four white stars, since this is the fourth warship to carry the USS Texas name.

When Captain John J. Litherland sent his sailors to their duty stations, they responded in unison: "Don't mess with Texas!"

The USS Texas (SSN-775) enters our Atlantic fleet in a leading role, at a critical time, with a formidable legacy. Each of the three previous U.S. Navy warships bearing the USS Texas name each in their own turn performed valiant service to keep the peace and maintain our liberty.

The initial USS Texas was authorized in 1886 as the first true American battleship. On June 16, 1898, at the dawn of the Spanish American War, USS Texas and a sister battleship reduced the Spanish fort at Cayo Del Tore in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, to ruins, neutralizing a significant threat to U.S. forces.

In 1911, the USS Texas was renamed the USS San Marcos so that another, bigger ship could assume the USS Texas name. The successor battleship USS Texas (BB 35) was commissioned in 1914 and became the first to mount anti-aircraft guns and

launch aircraft. In 1940, the USS Texas was designated the flagship of the U.S. Atlantic fleet.

The USS Texas played a key role in World War II. Its booming big guns helped soften Nazi defenses at Normandy in early June, 1944. By February of the following year, Texas was in the Pacific supporting landings at Iwo Jima and later at Okinawa.

The USS Texas became the nation's first memorial battleship and a national historic landmark. Today, you can visit the USS Texas, the oldest battleship still afloat, at the San Jacinto Battlefield southeast of Houston.

The third USS Texas, a pioneering, nuclear-powered, guided-missile destroyer, was commissioned in 1977 and saw extended service in the Middle East. The USS Texas was deployed to the North Arabian Sea during the Iran hostage crisis of 1980, and later engaged in combat responding to Libyan aggression in the Gulf of Sidra, then again off the coast of Iraq during Desert Storm in 1991.

Now, the brand new USS Texas demonstrates significant advances in innovation and technology, and is the first new submarine designed for undersea warfare in the post-Cold War era. The sub is more than 375 feet long, with a nuclear power plant, four torpedo tubes and 12 vertical-launch tubes. Sixty multi-use computer screens line the walls of its control room.

The submarine has numerous capabilities, some of them classified. It can maneuver close to shore in shallow water, launch SEAL commandos, and speed underwater indefinitely at speeds in excess of 25 knots (30 m.p.h.). It has advanced electronics to facilitate intelligence gathering, and can launch cruise missiles to strike enemy targets hundreds of miles inland. The ship and its crew are an awesome force.

Our best opportunity for peace is to remain strong. The new USS Texas represents well our determination to meet directly the challenges to freedom that emerge anywhere in the world.

Sen. Cornyn is a member of the following Senate Committees: Armed Services, Judiciary, Budget, Small Business and Entrepreneurship, and Joint Economic. He is the chairman of the subcommittees on Immigration, Border Security and Citizenship and Emerging Threats and Capabilities. Cornyn served previously as Texas Attorney General, Texas Supreme Court Justice and Bexar County District Judge.

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